

Charles Pemberton Wurts: Innovator, Publicist, Gentleman

By S. Robert Powell, Ph.D.

C. P. Wurts, one of the 13 children of George and Abigail Pettit Wurts, was born January 4, 1824 in Montville, NJ, and began working for the D&H at the age of 19. He had three famous uncles: Maurice and William Wurts, the founders of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company, and John Wurts, the third president of the D&H (who adopted his nephew, C. P. Wurts). Soon after his arrival in Carbondale, in 1843, C. P. Wurts was appointed assistant to James Archbald, the general superintendent of the D&H, serving in that capacity until James Archbald removed to Scranton in 1853, when C. P. Wurts assumed entire charge of the D&H's railroad affairs.

From James Archbald--a gentleman, a natural team player and leader of men, a highly intelligent problem solver, and an innovator with superior human relations skills—was the perfect mentor for C. P. Wurts, and his ten years of working with James Archbald was the best foundation possible for Wurts' ten years with the D&H as Chief Engineer, 1853-1863.

The first large scale project that James Archbald and his protégé worked on together was the 1845 configuration of the Gravity Railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale and the construction of the extension of the Gravity line to Archbald (1845 Configuration: see “The D&H Gravity Railroad: Five Configurations, Part 2”, *BLHS Bulletin*, December 2018, pp. 12, 14). As a result of this on-the-job apprenticeship under James Archbald, C. P. Wurts had at his command the skills and the leadership perspective that would serve him well for his entire management career with the D&H.

The need for a rail transportation system that would make it possible to send more coal to market than was possible with the 1845 configuration in place made it very clear to D&H management in the late 1850s that the present D&H rail system had to be revised, and C. P. Wurts, Chief Engineer of the D&H, working with Rollin Manville, Constructing Engineer in charge, began construction of the 1859 revision in April 1857 (1859 Configuration: see “The D&H Gravity Railroad: Five Configurations, Part 3”, *BLHS Bulletin*, January 2019, pp. 8-10).

That C. P. Wurts, working with James Archbald to make the 1845 configuration a reality, had learned the basics of how to build railroad over a mountain and that he embraced the position of Chief Engineer of the D&H, is very clear when one considers the highly efficient and complex transportation system that he and Rollin Manville designed and constructed at this time. One feature of this new configuration (detached light track levels on Planes 7 and 8) was a brilliant engineering innovation/achievement that would open a door (in the 1868 configuration of the D&H Gravity Railroad) to immense financial rewards for the D&H in the years ahead in the nineteenth century.

Projecting into the future and innovating for the benefit of the D&H were characteristics of C. P. Wurts' tenure as Chief Engineer. It was C. P. Wurts who, in 1859, initiated the idea of passenger service on the D&H. In an article published in a Carbondale newspaper, we read: "In this year [1859] the first passenger car was run over the Gravity. It was like the cars with the side seats now used sometimes on excursions. A car, loaded two-thirds full with culm and saturated with water to keep it from flying into the passengers' faces, was run in front to give impetus on the levels. On

this trial trip were C. P. Wurts and family, Lewis Pughe and family, E. P. Garland and family, Israel Decker and family, and Davis Alton who was then general coal inspector for the D&H. Hugh Powderly was in charge of the culm car and was thus engineer, firemen, conductor, and brakeman. The trip . . . to the foot of plane C, now known as plane 21, at Archbald, was made in 23 minutes. This time proving satisfactory, passenger cars were ordered to be built. The only persons now living in this city [Carbondale] who were on that trip are Mrs. Frank Taylor, then Mrs. Isaac Decker, and Mr. Powderly.”



Plane No. 23, Olyphant, PA (left, going up the hill) and Eaton and Co. Breaker (on the right). The loaded Gravity Railroad coal cars in the foreground (from Richmond No. 3 Breaker and/or the Von Storch Breaker) will be sent up Plane No. 23 and then through the D&H Gravity Railroad to Honesdale, where the coal will be loaded into D&H Canal boats and sent to market in New York.

Similarly, in December 1861, to prove to a skeptical public that a trestle on Level No. 27 from Archbald into Carbondale would support passenger coaches on the D&H, C. P. Wurts, the P. T. Barnum of mid-nineteenth century railroading in the Lackawanna Valley, arranged a publicity stunt, before a crowd of about a thousand spectators, using a heavy Gravity-gauge steam

locomotive, the locomotive, *Honesdale*, which was placed at the head of passenger coaches on Level No. 27 for the trip down Level No. 27 into Carbondale. C. P. Wurts and other D&H employees rode on the engine on its descent into Carbondale.

In the December 14, 1861 issue of the *Carbondale Advance* (p. 2), we read: **“Distinguished Visitor. / New Era.** / Yes, reader! An Iron Horse has actually run into our City [Carbondale], puffing and snorting, and stopped at about the same spot where the first settlers stopped, near the site of the old Log Tavern. / An inkling was had that it would come on Monday last, but our people supposing it would bring the noon passenger train, missed the sight, and consequently failed to give the stranger a public reception. / As it was however, a crowd of about a thousand, lined the track from the Lookout to the depot, and made all ring again with their cheers. / It was an experimental trip and entirely successfull under the carefull management of Engineer Cool. We noticed C. P. Wurts, esq. the master machinist, and other employees on the Valley Line, on the Engine, showing the travelling community thereby, that no passengers should be sent over the road, until it had been tested properly and they have confidence in the strength of the various pieces of trestle work on the line.” (*Carbondale Advance*, December 14, 1861, p. 2)

Similarly, it was under the direction of C. P. Wurts that the flatland Gravity Railroad was extended to the south from the foot of Plane No. 23 at Olyphant in 1859-1860, and that two short and very different rail lines were constructed south of Olyphant at this time: (1) a short Gravity-gauge rail line south from the foot of Plane No. 23 (on the eastern side of the Lackawanna River) and across the Lackawanna River to connect with the Richmond No. 3 Breaker (1860-1863: C. P. Wurts and William H. Richmond were partners in this breaker) and Von Storch breakers, and (2) a 4-mile long standard-gauge track (completed by February 1860) on the western shore of the Lackawanna River, from the point where the Gravity tracks arrived on the western shore of the Lackawanna River (aka. Valley Junction), to the south to Providence. This 4-mile long standard gauge track was not only the first section of standard-gauge track on the D&H but also on any American railroad (56 1/2 inches as standard gauge was not officially adopted by railroads in America until 1863, during the administration of Abraham Lincoln).

The importance of this achievement by C. P. Wurts in 1859 was recognized by knowledgeable observers at the time. In the following article that was published in the *Carbondale Advance* of December 17, 1859, when the extension of the line from the foot of Plane No. 23 to Providence was under construction, Charles P. Wurts was praised not only for undertaking the construction of the initial section of a standard-gauge steam locomotive line from Carbondale to Providence, but also for his role in the design and implementation of the 1859 configuration of the Delaware and Hudson Gravity Railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale.

“The Del. & Hud. Canal Co.’s Railroad. / Our readers are informed, says the *Tri-States Union*, that the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company is making great changes and improvements in the Railroad for the transportation of coal from the mines to Honesdale. One of these improvements contemplates an extension of the Road from Carbondale to Providence, for passengers as well as freight business, a work now nearly completed. [A 4 ½ mile section of the Valley Road was "nearly completed" at the time this article was published. The entire line, the Valley Road from Carbondale to Scranton was not completed until 1871.] The *Scranton Republican* gives some interesting information concerning the Road, in an article from which we make the following extract: / From

what we saw, and can learn, we are more than ever convinced of the superior engineering skill and excellent general superintendence of Mr. Charles P. Wurts, under whose supervision the new road [the 1859 configuration of the Gravity Railroad] has been built, the old road entirely relaid with heavy T rail, the planes all rebuilt, new engines of the best and strongest kind supplied in place of the old ones, and, in fact, the whole road and its equipment improved so as to be essentially a new one... We are informed that by the new arrangement they will be able to carry over the road, if desirable, more than one million tons of coal per annum, having by these alterations more than doubled their former capacity for business... For a Company so long established, and which was accused at one time of being somewhat behind the age, we think an extraordinary amount of energy and wisdom has been manifested in these recent improvements, and for economy and prudence in management, and the business tact generally displayed, it is probably entitled to the first rank in the country, if not in the world.”(*Carbondale Advance*, December 17, 1859, p. 2)

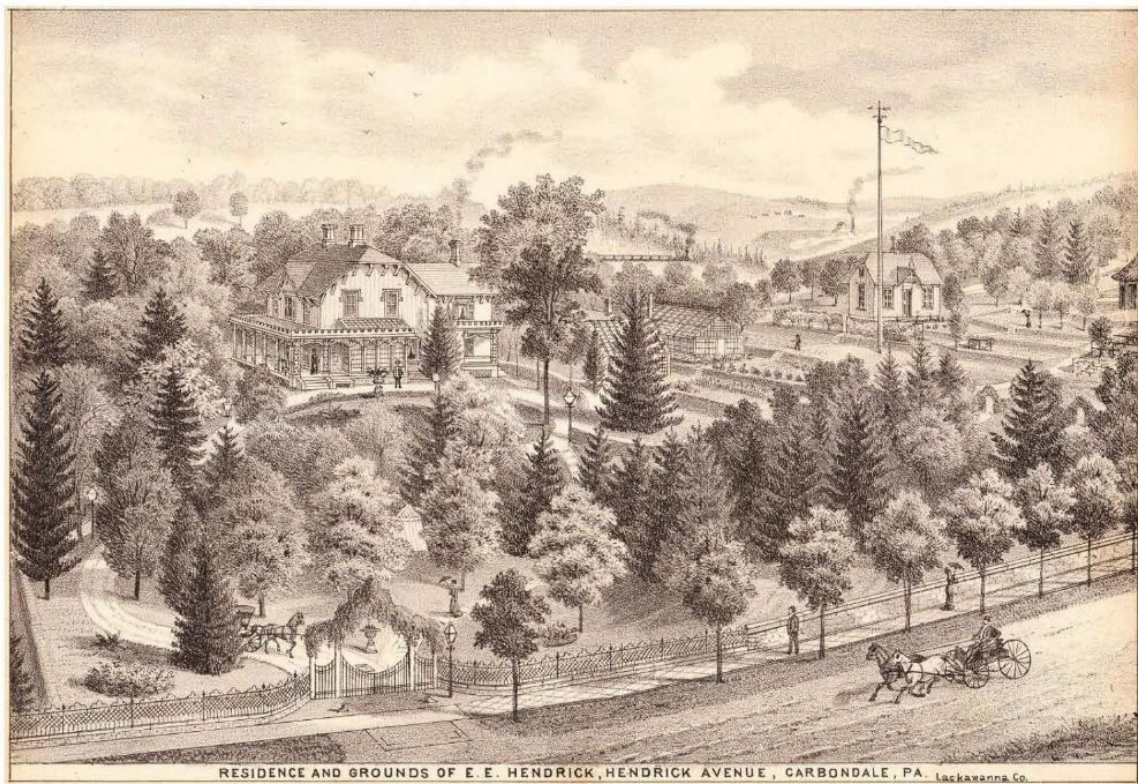
From that article we learn, in addition, that in implementing the 1859 configuration of the Gravity Railroad, C. P. Wurts not only bought all raw materials locally but also did not interrupt the day-to-day operations of the company as work proceeded on the revisions: “We were really surprised to find everything working with such perfect regularity, and to see such great changes accomplished without having interfered with the regular business of the Company... There is one thing in this connection, particularly worthy of notice and commendation. Every article required for the road was obtained as near home as possible. The rails were furnished by the Scranton Coal and Iron Company, while the engines, which would be a credit to any establishment, were manufactured by Dickson & Co., in Scranton. It would be well if all operating companies [then and now] would do likewise, instead of sending abroad to have work done no better and no cheaper than it could be done at home”.

C. P. Wurts and Labor Relations Savoir Faire: In the area of labor relations, C. P. Wurts showed himself to be a highly effective manager, with extraordinary insight and knowledge in the complex arena of labor/management relations. The first great strike at the D&H collieries took place in 1857, when the miners made a demand for an advance of two and one-half cents per ton. The regular price for mining at that time was thirty-five cents. At that time, the miners congregated every afternoon on the hill east of Park Street in Carbondale to talk over with C. P. Wurts their point of view and their salary requests. C. P. Wurts listened to the miners and assured them that the advance asked for would be given them only when operations were resumed. The men took him at his word and went back to work.

That negotiating pattern (go back to work now and the advance asked for will be given) became standard procedure for the D&H in the years ahead, and the D&H, unlike many other coal and railroad companies at the time, especially those in the southern anthracite fields, had relatively few labor/management problems.

The C. P. Wurts House in Hendrick Park: In 1852, C. P. Wurts purchased the Thomas and Charlotte Sweet property: a ten acre parcel, surrounded by a stone wall, on upper Lincoln Avenue in Carbondale: deed from Thomas and Charlotte Sweet, to Charles P. Wurts, dated April 20, 1852; Thomas Sweet was the first resident physician in Carbondale. On that property, C. P. Wurts had constructed, a splendid town house. The house and grounds surrounding the house are unquestionably full-bodied expressions of the architectural and landscape gardening beliefs of

Andrew Jackson Downing, one of the leading architects/landscape designers in mid-nineteenth century America. To design and plant the park surrounding the town house, C. P. Wurts engaged Alexander Shannon (born in Dumfries, Scotland, July 12, 1825; grew to manhood on the home farm, where he acquired a broad knowledge of landscape design and maintenance) who began working in the railroad department of the D&H shortly after he came to America in 1850. In the park surrounding the Wurts house were various outbuildings and amenities (a green house, a pond, a carriage house, a stable). In 1854, C. P. Wurts married Laura Jay (1832-1910), who was a granddaughter of Peter Augustus Jay, and a great granddaughter of Supreme Court justice and diplomat, John Jay. C. P. Wurts and his wife Laura were the parents of 6 children.



Engraving of the *Residence and Grounds of E. E. Hendrick, Hendrick Avenue, Carbondale, PA* (formerly the residence of C. P. Wurts and family), facing page 443, in *History of Luzerne Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, PA. with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Their Prominent Men and Pioneers*, 1880.

Close of Career with the D&H and Retirement: From 1860 to 1863 C. P. Wurts was in partnership with W. H. Richmond in coal properties (mines and Richmond No. 3 breaker) in Dickson City and Providence. He was also associated at this time with Edward Jones (Archbald), and Lewis Pughe, Esquire (Carbondale), and Rev. Abel Barker (Carbondale) in a private mining company that had contracted, in 1858, to sell to the D&H coal that they mined on the Hull, Mott, and other tracts in Blakely.

In 1864, Rollin Manville replaced C. P. Wurts as superintendent of D&H railroad department. In 1865, Eli Hendrick bought the C. P. Wurts house (deed dated June 16, 1865, from Charles P. Wurtz and Laura Wurtz, his wife, to Eli E. Hendrick). Payment for the house and grounds: Eli Hendrick traded C. P. Wurts \$100,000 of the stock of the Great Northern Oil Company for the Wurtz residence. This splendid residence, which has been owned and carefully looked after by several different enlightened owners in the past 171 years, looks very much today as it did in 1880, when the engraving of the house and park shown here was created.

Now retired following his long and distinguished career with the D&H, C. P. Wurts and his family went abroad and spent several years in Europe. Upon their return, the family moved to New Haven, CT. On August 11, 1892, at Bar Harbor, Maine, at age 68, C. P. Wurts died. His earthly remains are interred in the John Jay Cemetery, Rye, NY.
